

Small win, but your voice is needed

It might not seem like much a win for the citizens who showed up Wednesday to stop Phoenix from slapping a new parking fee on hikers, but you should be proud of what active citizens are making happen. The fee vote was continued to Oct. 6, which I hope allows time for an alternative to a new fee/tax.

I applaud the Council for this new look at the subject, which hopefully leads the city in a new direction.

Wednesday's citizen showing at the meeting may prove to be a turning point in the most important fiscal debate in Phoenix in decades.

The voice and presence of people who showed up, who contacted the council members, who passed out fliers and who talked with their friends and neighbors – that at least temporarily stopped the city from adding the \$2 parking fee.

But let's back up a couple of months and connect the dots:

- First the Parks Board was convinced that if it didn't produce revenue to kick into the general fund that pays normal city operating costs, cuts even harsher than the deep ones imposed in the current budget could be forthcoming. It considered a parking fee as high as \$5 a day on hikers.
- After park users and taxpayers who were tired of the avalanche of fee and tax hikes (\$100 million in the past seven months) protested, the proposed parking fee was dropped to \$2.
- Next, city management proposed allocating all fee revenues to parks, not the general fund (although neither staff nor the Council can guarantee that).
- Finally, after all the calls, fliers, blogs and emails opposing new fees, advocates for the parking fees couldn't muster enough City Council votes to pass it.

So what's the common denominator here?

You.

It was an energized citizenry, tired of the continual drumbeat of new city-imposed taxes, and that is making management take notice. Your voices are finally getting louder than the ones that want more taxes and fees to support unsustainably high labor cost average of \$100,000 (for 14,000 employee).

When the city passed a \$50 million food tax with barely the 24 hours notice required by law, your voices were not heard, by design. Little protest accompanied the sewer fee hikes, water fee hikes, business application fee hikes and many of the early increases that add up to \$100 million in new taxes.

But they're starting to hear you now.

Congratulations. Your hard work was greater and your voice was louder than those who want you to sacrifice so they don't have to.

The snowball has started to roll downhill and is picking up speed. To truly have an impact, though, it needs to collect more snow. Those of you who believe that a city should first serve its citizens have to keep up the pressure, talk to your neighbors and make the "enough is enough" message viral.

It was a little win, a small turn of the rudder. That's how you begin to steer ships in different directions. So thanks, and keep it up.

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